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Idaho Transportation Department

Today's News Briefs

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Author:

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Opinion: Demand that we fund our transportation necessities

NAMPA - Think back several years ago to when Interstate 84 between Nampa and Meridian was being expanded. Remember all the orange cones, concrete barriers and reduced speed limit zones (not that many people paid much attention to those last, but we digress).

We all knew it would be worth the temporary inconvenience in the long run. More lanes mean better traffic flow, and now that the project has been finished, we've seen just how much of a difference it has made.

Recall also that the original plan was to include an expansion of I-84 all the way to Caldwell. But now we're told that funding for that phase of the project has dried up, and even modest plans to repave the blacktop between Canyon County's two largest towns have been shelved.

It makes sense that we shouldn't be spending a little money for largely cosmetic, insufficient makeovers that will crumble again in just a few years. We need to do the job and do it right, and that would cost about \$120 million to improve I-84 between Franklin Boulevard in Nampa and Franklin Road in Caldwell, according to the Idaho Transportation Department.

The Idaho Legislature punted this year on transportation funding — ostensibly because this is an election year. Well, the election is just a month away, and when January rolls around soon, there's no excuse to put it off any longer. Idaho's lingering transportation needs have to be addressed, and high up on the list of priorities need to be completion of the I-84 project in Canyon County and full completion of the Central Valley Expressway on Idaho 16 linking Emmett to the rest of the Treasure Valley and providing a desperately needed north-south corridor.

Yes, these projects are going to cost money, but they will pay themselves off. How? By increasing commercial activity. That's what transportation infrastructure projects like these do.

Where should the money come from? Here are some suggestions:

- * An increase in the gasoline tax, which hasn't been raised in two decades.
- * An increase in vehicle registration fees.
- * Toll booths on highly traveled interstates.
- * Transportation and Economic Development Zones (TEDZ), a funding option promoted for Idaho 16 that functions by using a portion of new sales taxes generated by the growth around highway projects to finance the projects.
- * Idaho has a great credit rating. That means we can borrow money at low rates. That's how we got our current Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle (GARVEE) projects done.

Contact your legislators and insist they do something about this. See the attached box for contact information (unless, of course, they aren't reelected or lose their specified positions). The time for stalling is over.

Canyon County's elected officials on transportation groups

* Sen. Jim Rice, Caldwell, Senate Transportation Committee, 891-4178.

* Rep. Brandon Hixon, Caldwell, House Transportation and Defense Committee, 440-1074.

* Rep. Rick Youngblood, Nampa, House Transportation and Defense Committee, 412-5107

Contact information for all members of the Idaho Legislature can be found at
<http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/>.